Leh Heritage Walk

Map by Pimpin de Azevedo with A. Alexander, J. Niewoohner, ©THF

After several decades of neglect and degradation, things are finally improving in old Leh. In 2003 the German NGO Tibet Heritage Fund (THF) listed 380 historic structures in Leh (see website: www.tibetheritagefund.org). THF had previously conducted a five-year conservation and upgrading project in historic Lhasa. With that experience, THF thought it possible to preserve old Leh and make it liveable again. Problems there are many. Leaking roofs, abandoned and dilapidated houses, unpaved (or badly paved) alleys and water supply. In 2004-2005, as a pilot project, the Guru Lhakhang shrine, high on a ridge next to the palace, was restored, and the local group LOTI (Leh Old Town Initiative) was set up. In the old town several house owners took up our offer of 50% co-financing for restoration of historic residential buildings. The Sofi House in the Stagpaoling area (near Old Ladakh Guesthouse) was the first to be rehabilitated. THF/LOTI then paved the alley leading from Old Ladakh Guesthouse up to the Stalam road with slate stone, and built a drain covered with removable metal grilles. For this work we received a UNESCO award and a UN Habitat Dubai Best Practice Award. Since 2006, THF/LOTI have completed the rehabilitation of numerous historic residential buildings, and restored the Tsas Soma Masjid Sharif and the courtyard of Buddhist Gonpa Soma. THF/LOTI have also conserved the wall-paintings of the Red Chamba in Leh and at Tsaktapuri in Alchi, and are involved in the design of two museums and a library for Leh, including the Central Asian Museum at Tsas Soma. The Sankar Labrang at Manikhang was converted into a permanent exhibition room, where local Ladakhi artists can show their works. THF/LOTI offer guided Heritage Walks through the old town, please ask at Lala's Gallery. There is some hope, but a sustainable turn-around of the old town will require the sustained efforts and cooperation of everyone concerned. THF / LOTI, Lakhur House, upper Stalam, Leh Tel: 250175, info@tibetheritagefund.org

1. Namgyal Tsering tower and chapel, built by king Tashi Namgyal (r. ca. 1520-1540).
2. Tsering Lhamo Gonkhang (protector temple), built by king Tashi Namgyal after victory over an invading army from Yarkand in 1552.
3. Tsering Champa Lhakhang (Maitreya Temple), built by Trapsa Bumde (r. ca. 1400-1440).
4. Leh palace, Le-chên Pel-khar, built by king Senge Namgyal (r. ca. 1636-1642); since the overthrow of the dynasty in the mid-19th century vacated, currently owned by the Indian government, restored by the Archaeological Survey of India.
5. Namgyal Choerten, a Buddhist stupa built to protect the palace.
6. Guru Lhakhang, a Buddhist shrine built in the early 17th century and operated by 44 Buddhist families of Leh, restored 2004-2005 by THF/LOTI.
7. Lonpo House, formerly the residence of one of the king's ministers, presently owned by Chemrey monastery.
8. Gonpa Soma, built in 1840 by lama Tashi Tenpel above the old royal stables.
9. Gonpa Soma's chamma courtyard; here the Ladakhi group LASOL perform traditional songs and dances.
10. Red Champa Lhakhang; the "red temple of Maitreya", was built by king Trapsa Bumde (r. ca. 1400-1440); it was restored in the 19th century after a Dogra invasion, and again in the late 1950s, when it was partly rebuilt. In 2005 THF/LOTI discovered underneath whitewash remains of the original 15th century wall-paintings. These were brought back and conserved by a group of Romanians, German, Belgian, French and Ladakhi restorers and restoration students.
11. Chentse Lhakhang (temple of Avakuteshvara), built in the 17th century as main monastic assembly hall for Leh.
12. Lakhur house, one of the best-preserved old Leh mansion houses, currently the office of THF/LOTI.
13. Stupa gate.
14. Munshi house, formerly home to a royal secretary, is being converted into an art center by Mumbai-based group Lamo.
15. Stalam (horse road), a pathway leading up to the palace.
16. Lala's Cafe & Gallery, formerly Sankar Labrang, the home of the keeper of the white Maitreya temple, now a gallery-cum-café operated by THF/LOTI; in the ground floor is a chapel room with stone carvings, and upstairs are exhibitions about the history of Leh and art by Ladakhi artists. At the entrance stands a Buddhist stupa carved dating ca. to the 10th century, which was recovered from nearby.
17. Manikhang, a group of stupa's close to the now-demolished main entrance gate to old Leh town.
18. White Champa Lhakhang, the white Maitreya temple, also credited to king Trapsa Bumde in the 15th century.
19. Jamia Masjid, Sunni mosque, founded around 1666/7
20. Stupa gate to old town.
21. Chatayır Taktik street, where bread is freshly baked.
22. Tsas Soma Masjid Sharif (Sunni) and Central Asian Museum.
23. Sh'a Masjid-e-Sharif.
24. Leh Doling, the new main Buddhist temple for Leh built in 1957-1962 by the Ladakhi Buddhist association.
25. Stupa gate.
26. Old carved gateway to the former Thokslak office.
27. Stagpaoling stupa gate, THF/LOTI paved the alley with slate stone, built a drain, and restored the Sofi and Hor Yarkandi houses.
28. Mani wall.
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- Namgyal Tsomo
- Tsemo Lhama Gonikhang
- Tsemo Chamba Lhakhang
- Leh palace, Leh-chen Pel-khar
- Namgyal Choerten
- Guru Lhakhang
- Lombo House
- Gonpa Soma
- Gonpa Soma chamna
- Red Chamba Lhakhang
- Chorzeri Lhakhang
- Lakru house
- Stupa gate
- Stalam road
- White Champa Lhakhang
- Lala's Gallery (Sarkar Labrang)
- Manikhang
- Munshi House
- Jamia Masjid
- Stupa gate
- Chutayrangtak street
- Tsas Soma Masjid Sharif
- Shi'a Masjid-e-Sharif
- Leh Jokhang
- Stupa gate
- Tehsildar gate
- Stagopilpog stupa gate
- Mani wall
- Central Asian Museum